Characters

Yasako Yamashita	A Japanese woman, early 30s
Hiro Yamashita	Yasako's husband, a Japanese man, 39
Shizuko Mizoguchi	A Japanese woman, early 30s
Fuyo	A spirit, Yasako's mother
Angela Rossetti	An attorney
Evelyn Lauderdale	A neighbor

TIME AND PLACE: San Diego, California, Japan, and Netherworlds. 1985.

Prologue

PROLOGUE

[*Ocean sounds fade in and crescendo. In the darkness*, Yasako *enters as lights fade in low, whirling, shaping a world around her. There is a scrim as backdrop, and ocean waves dress the floor*. Yasako *comes forward using slow, methodical movements*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

A tiny rock is cast out to sea by the great Sun Goddess Amaterasu and it grows into an island, strong and unwavering, beautiful and bright. I am a root in this soil. I grow best here, all blossoms, all fruits, always.

[*a beat*]

But, one day, the gardener comes and I am transplanted. The winds, the rain, the gnawing forces of erosion transform the blossoms, scattering them into the river of time.

[*She removes a silky American flag from her kimono sleeve and billows it about her as the figure of* Fuyo *appears as a shadow lit behind the scrim*. Fuyo *enters. A spirit, the back of her kimono trails behind her in shredded strands. Her face is snowy white; her hair is wild, long, grey-streaked. She glides beneath a gossamer shroud. The lights on her are shadowy while the lights on* Yasako *are a bit brighter*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Good-bye, Mother.

[Fuyo *shakes her head*.]

But I am his wife.

[Fuyo *looks downward in sadness*.]

And your daughter becomes a mother.

[Fuyo *beckons to* Yasako.]

Do not fear for my child in America, Mother. Her soul is tied with mine. She will never walk alone.

[Fuyo *encircles her daughter as* Yasako *weaves in and around her*.]

FUYO

Se o hayami iwa ni sekaruru . . .

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Our lives like the river's foam split asunder by boulders . . .

FUYO

. . . takigawa no warete mo sue ni awanto zo omou.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

In the end,

FUYO

. . . kono yo de . . .

YASAKO YAMASHITA

. . . in this world . . .

FUYO AND YASAKO

. . . or some other . . .

YASAKO YAMASHITA

. . . we will find each other again.

[Yasako *removes her kimono, startling* Fuyo. *She gives it to* Fuyo. Fuyo *kneels to fold it as* Yasako *kneels to fold the flag*. Yasako *presents the flag to her mother and bows*.]

Doozo, Okaasan.

[*a beat*]

Wife, mother, and now orphan, I go.

[*a beat*]

Sayoonara.

[Yasako *bows again*. Fuyo *wipes away imaginary tears and runs off-stage*. Yasako *rises as the sound of a seven-year-old girl's laughter tinkles, blending with a news bite that marks the year as 1984, i˙e˙, the re-election of Ronald Reagan. The sounds bridge into:*]

Act 1

Act 1, Scene 1

ACT I SCENE ONE

[*The Yamashita home, into which* Yasako *enters as lights brighten. A hot summer day. Intermittently, sounds of the ocean are heard in the distance*. Yasako *folds a young girl's dress. She sits and leafs through a journal*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

August third. Seven to eight: make breakfast. Eight to nine: wash Kuniko's clothing. Nine to ten: piano. My world. America is outside, a place to visit when I take Kuniko to school. My husband buys the groceries, pays the bills. Once I had to take Kuniko to the doctor. That was hard.

[*puts book away, calls out*]

Kuniko! Kuniko-chan! Come my child. Time for music!

[*imagines a girl running in*]

Kuniko! You forgot to take your shoes off! What bad manners you've learned! Sit, sit. Kuniko! Keep your dress on! Nice girls do not sing in their panties! Let's sing Japanese songs today.

[*plays a few notes on table top*]

"Haru ga kita, haru ga kita, doko ni kita. Yama ni kita, sato ni kita, no ni mo kita."

[*Abruptly, the voice of the seven-year-old*, Kuniko, *emanates seemingly from all around* Yasako *as she looks around in delight:*]

KUNIKO'S VOICE

[*sings*]

"Down the river, oh down the river, oh down the river we go-o-o; down the river, oh down the river, oh down the Ohio! The river is up and the channel is deep, the wind is steady and strong. Oh won't we have a jolly good time as we go sailing along!"

[*Amid this singing*, Yasako *stands, and lights diminish to a spotlight on her as she looks out at the audience. She begins over the singing:*]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

In Japan, your grandmother and I lived by the inland sea. But now there is Coronado and the big Pacific Ocean. Papa found this nice apartment so I can hear the waves. I close my eyes and pretend it is the seashore in Japan.

[*a beat*]

Kuniko-chan. Did you know there is a world beneath the sea? With mermaids and sapphire fish, coral and sea stars. The mermaids have serious business: they guide lost souls to the next world.

[*a beat*]

. . . a soul is . . . everything a person feels or dreams, an essence that cannot be touched unless you use your heart, your true heart. Kokoro. Mind, heart, spirit.

[*a beat*]

You have a soul, too, Kuniko. A seven-year-old soul that has been around the universe many times. And it will never be lost because I will find you easily, wherever there are Japanese peaches. You eat so many that you smell as golden blush and alive as their sweet flesh.

[*Bursts of laughter in* Kuniko's *voice are heard in voice-over (V˙O˙) as the spotlight fades and lights fade up*. Yasako *resigns herself to this silliness that she finds endearing*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*looks at watch and checks journal*]

Okay, silly monkey. Time for homework so you can grow up and go to college like Mommy. Read for an hour, then math. Then we will have lunch and think about O-bon Festival.

KUNIKO'S VOICE

Mommy, when I grow up can I still live with you?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*overlapping*]

Well, I think —

KUNIKO'S VOICE

[*continuous*]

Mommy, why can't I ever have friends sleep over like all the American kids?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*overlapping*]

"Sleep over"?

KUNIKO'S VOICE

[*continuous*]

Mommy? You ever heard of a group called The Beatles?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*smiles*]

Yes! One of them married a Japanese. But he died. You can say hello to his spirit at O-bon Festival. And Obaachan's spirit. And my father's, too. Festival of the Dead, Kuniko; a happy time to visit with our ancestors and then light lanterns to guide them back to their worlds.

[Hiro Yamashita *appears. Lights fade and a spotlight goes up on him and* Yasako. *Both look out at the audience*.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

Good, Yasako. Clothes smell better for my little girl when you wash them by hand.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Kuniko? If I was a kangaroo, I would ride you in my pocket forever.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Stop carrying that child! She's too old to be carried!

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Kuniko, come. It is time for tea. I made o-manju.

HIRO YAMASHITA

I bought you the recipe book. Page 243, how to make apple pie.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Hiro, teach me how to write checks, how to use the "ATM."

HIRO YAMASHITA

Last week, lady was robbed at an ATM.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Hiro, teach me how to talk to her teachers.

HIRO YAMASHITA

What's so difficult about talking to a teacher? I could talk to President Reagan, if I had to.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

One to two: wash floors. Two to three: dusting the furniture.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yasako, make some friends.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I do not know what to say to American women.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Go borrow a cup of sugar or something.

[*a beat*]

Here. I bought you a new dress. With a little style. Try it on.

[*The sound of a child running into a lamp and falling is heard*. Yasako *screams with suddenness and* Hiro

jumps.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Ara, Kuniko! Papa, she fell and hit her head on the lamp!

HIRO YAMASHITA

It's just a flesh wound, Yasako. Calm down.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

She cut herself twice on that stupid lamp. Poor Kuniko-chan. Get rid of the lamp, Papa.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Come here, Kuniko-chan. Papa will make it better. Look at her! She hugs like people in American movie. I love it. Give Papa a great big television kiss, Kuniko.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Mommy tries to kiss, Kuniko, but it feels so strange. Do you remember how my mother taught you how to bow?

[*bows*]

Bow like this. Very good, Kuniko!

[*a beat*]

Kuniko-chan, are you ready? Time for O-bon Festival. Put on your yukata.

[*O-bon music begins*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

We will dance under the lanterns and the moon, and welcome back my mother's spirit.

[Fuyo *appears upstage, moving gracefully in O-bon odori (festival dance). O-bon paper lanterns gleam from behind the scrim*. Yasako *joins her, beckoning to* Kuniko *and then to the reluctant* Hiro *as a kuro-ko (black-draped figure of traditional Japanese theater who provides on-stage assistance) puts yukata on them. As the dance ends, a bored* Hiro *ceases first, and then* Yasako. Fuyo *continues to weave around them, still dancing:*]

HIRO YAMASHITA

[*dismissing culture*]

Bon Festival's just old country folktale stuff. An excuse to eat and drink. Your mother's not here. She's ashes and dust.

[Fuyo *stamps her foot towards* Hiro *to protest this remark*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

She is here, listening to all of this; and, when you go to Heaven, she will not make o-manju for you.

[*reacting*]

Kuniko! No! Do not shake the urn!

[Fuyo *reacts as if being shaken and gently tumbles to the ground*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Yes, my mother is in the urn. Yes, she is coming to visit you, but in spirit, not like a genie out of the bottle. Oh, Kuniko, bad girl. You spilled Obaachan's cremains all over the floor!

HIRO YAMASHITA

[*laughs*]

Let's get out the vacuum cleaner.

[Fuyo *reacts*.]

Just kidding! Oh, Yasako, all that old Japanese stuff. Nobody cares about Bon Festival or kimono anymore. Not even in Japan.

[Hiro *removes yukata and drops it to the floor*. Fuyo *looks at it with sadness, picks it up and exits*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Okay, Kuniko, get ready for bed.

[*The presence of* "Kuniko" *exits*.]

I care. My mother raised me to care.

[*a beat*]

Don't you want Kuniko to learn about Japanese culture?

HIRO YAMASHITA

Don't you want her to get along in American culture?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

We won't live here forever.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Let her be different. A California original.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

A place does not change who she is.

HIRO YAMASHITA

It does! Even the cherry trees here are bigger and taller.

[*He sits in the chair and soaks his feet in the basin of water as she hands him a towel*.]

Why waste your time making homemade o-manju? Just buy it down at Fugetsudo. My customers at my restaurant never eat it. It just gets hard like rocks. Waitress almost put out my eye when she threw one at me.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

What? A waitress threw o-manju at you?

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yeah. She could pitch professional baseball.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You must fire her or ask her to resign. After all, what shame she must feel.

HIRO YAMASHITA

[*laughs*]

Hardly. Not that one.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

But so bold.

HIRO YAMASHITA

She says we should put American food on the menu. Strawberry ice cream.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

But then it wouldn't be a Japanese restaurant anymore.

HIRO YAMASHITA

I mean just change the decoration a little bit; put a small American flag on the counter to make the white people happy.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*She dries his feet. Then, no longer interested, she stops*.]

We should have moved back to Japan by now.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Don't start that again.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

It has been six years, Hiro. I thought we were going back before Kuniko started school.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Good schools here.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I want her in Japanese schools.

HIRO YAMASHITA

There're Japanese schools right here.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

One day a week on Saturdays? I want her in real Japanese school.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yes. Of course.

[*touches her hair*]

Such beautiful hair. Pull it back, off your face.

[*She pulls it away from her face*.]

Well, I'd better get to work. Don't wait up for me.

[*a beat*]

I might have to sleep there if it gets too late.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Oh, don't do that again. You're so grumpy the next day.

HIRO YAMASHITA

I need to look at the books. Besides, I don't want to wake you up so late.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You are asleep in the morning when Kuniko gets up and gone to work by the time she comes home from school. You work too hard.

HIRO YAMASHITA

We're lucky to have such good business, Yasako. You should see the restaurant. So many customers.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Hiro, if we went home, you could go back into my family's electric company.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yasako, please.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Just promise one day we will go back.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Don't worry. Japan isn't going anywhere. And we have a lot to do here.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I'm sorry. You're right. I should be helping you at the restaurant instead of worrying about Japan.

HIRO YAMASHITA

You stay home, take care of Kuniko. That's your job. That's how you help me.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

But you said there are so many customers.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Come here and kiss me, Yasako.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Hiro! Sometimes you sound so American.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Good. American men are smart then. Kiss me.

[*She looks sad; he kisses her cheek gently*.]

I put some tuna in the refrigerator. It's very fresh. Just for you.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Thank you.

[*He suddenly comes into the house with shoes on — which she stares at in shock — and then lifts her up in the air, planting a big kiss on her. She's pleased, but embarrassed*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Hiro!

HIRO YAMASHITA

To hell with culture, Yasako. When in Rome, do as the Romans do, right?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

This is San Diego.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Oh, Yasako, it's just a figure of speech.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

It's a cliche.

HIRO YAMASHITA

[*touches her hair*]

My mother told me never marry a girl who was smarter than me or who loved me at first sight.

[*Offstage, the sound of* Kuniko *calling her mother in Japanese — "Okaasan! Kite yo!" — is heard*. Yasako *reacts*.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

Go on.

[*begins to exit*]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Hiro? I'm sorry.

HIRO YAMASHITA

About what?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

If I had friends like in Japan, women to have tea with, it would be different.

[*The girl's voice calls from off stage again: "Mama!"*]

HIRO YAMASHITA

Better hurry. Go on, my dear wife.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Hurry home, Papa.

[*He exits. Lights cross-fade to a downstage spot-light in which* Yasako *kneels*.]

Here, Kuniko. Drink tea. Ban-cha for good dreams.

[*a beat*]

No matter what, Kuniko, Mommy will keep you by her side, okay? In Japan, we say mother and child are one until you are a big girl who can live outside of my shadow. Go back to sleep now. Sleep. Good girl.

[*Lights cross-fade to another spotlight in which stands* Evelyn Lauderdale, *a faintly exotic-looking, warm, tomboyish woman. She whistles for a pet*.]

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Panther? Here, Panther. Here, kitty, kitty.

[Yasako *enters and hands her the "cat."*]

You found my cat! Bad cat! Gallivanting all around the neighborhood after sundown! Thank you so much, Mrs˙ Yamashita.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Glad to help.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Usually, Kuniko rescues her. It's nice that you found her this time. Gives us a chance to talk.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Well, I do not want to bother you. I will be going now.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

No, no. It's no bother at all. Ever since you moved in last year, Kuniko's been a bundle of sunshine for me. She's my friend and so you are, too. Okay?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Of course. Thank you.

[*mimics handing her another item*]

Here. A present. Peaches, my daughter's favorite fruit.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Thank you. To be honest, Kuniko leaves one peach a day on my porch. I made a peach cobbler once and she ate two pieces.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

"Cobbler?"

[*bows*]

I am sorry for the trouble.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Are you kidding? I love it. She's a great kid.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Thank you.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Would you like to come in? Please. Let's have the peaches together.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Actually . . . I came to ask a favor.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Anything. I owe you and Kuniko for saving my cat. I'd lay bets she only has two lives left. What can I do for you?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*afraid to ask*]

Well, I, uh . . .

[Evelyn *encourages with a smile*]

I, uh, uh . . . I thought I might borrow a cup of sugar.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

[*not what she expected*]

Sugar? Of course. What are you baking?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Baking? I, uh, well, actually, my favor is a little bigger than that.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Please. Go ahead.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Well, my husband needs me at our restaurant. Just for a short while. Could you stay with my daughter for me? She never wakes up so there shouldn't be any problem.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Don't you worry about a thing, Mrs˙ Yamashita. I'm happy to help out. Let me get my things. I hope everything's okay.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

It's fine. My husband was hinting this evening that he needs help. Things are very busy. Californians really like Japanese food.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

And Japanese like American food, too.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Not me.

[*They move to the Yamashita home as lights cross-fade*. Yasako *hands her a long list*.]

These are important numbers. Her pediatrician, her allergist, the restaurant, poison control center. But you know you call 1-9-9 first.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

[*kindly*]

9-1-1.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Yes, of course.

[Evelyn *gently guides her away*.]

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Don't worry, Mrs˙ Yamashita.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

One more thing.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Yes?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

The bus.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

The bus?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Yes. Could you teach me how to take it?

[Evelyn *smiles and nods. They exit as lights cross-fade*.]

Act 1, Scene 2

SCENE TWO

[*A small, trendy-elegant Japanese restaurant represented by a table with chairs, linen tablecloth, and flower; contemporary Japanese music in background*. Yasako *sits at a table perusing a menu. Enter* Shizuko

Mizoguchi, *elegant, contemporary, striking. She carries a pad and pen. Her clothing reflects the style of the decor*.]

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Good evening. Are you ready to order?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Age dashi-dofu and unagi no kabayaki, please.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

[*smiles broadly*]

You made the right choice. The eel is very good. The owner buys his seafood fresh every morning at the fish market.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*looking at her curiously*]

Are you Japanese? You have no accent at all.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Yes, I'm Japanese. How long have you been in the States?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Since 1978.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Wow. Six years. You seem like the type who'd rather live in Japan.

[*smiles genuinely*]

Am I right?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*liking her*]

Yes. I married my brother-in-law's cousin and he wanted to live in America. For a while.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

I see. Well, you'll do okay. Don't worry. Can I get you something to drink?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Hot tea, please.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Sure. Let me put your order in. Great dress.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Thank you. My husband gave it to me as a gift. Can you find him for me?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Who?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

My husband.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Are you supposed to meet him here?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Not exactly, but —

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

What does he look like?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*shy pride*]

Well, he's, uh . . . well, you know. Mr˙ Yamashita.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Mr˙ Yamashita? Hiro Yamashita? You're . . . Mrs˙ Yamashita?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Yes. And you are?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Shizuko Mizoguchi. Have you heard of me?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

No. Should I have heard about you?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

I'm the one who threw o-manju at your husband.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*surprised*]

Oh. I expected someone older and . . . tougher.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Tough? Is that what he said? He means assertive. What do you think?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Think? About what?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

About me throwing o-manju at your husband.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

It made me wonder if, well, you know, you were —

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Crazy? Yeah. Crazy to still be hanging around here after three years.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Well, please be careful. Mr˙ Yamashita is a patient man, but you must not throw things at your boss.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Yeah. My boss. Thanks for the advice, sister.

[Hiro *comes running out and stops short at the sight of the two women*.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yasako. Hello. What are you doing here?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

She's a customer, just like everybody else in your life, boss.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Hello, Papa. I took the bus here!

HIRO YAMASHITA

Miss Mizoguchi, please bring my wife some tea.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Yes, some tea would be nice, Papa.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

I have three paying customers to serve.

HIRO YAMASHITA

I said bring her some tea. Do it.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

[*simply*]

Yes, Papa. Anything Papa say.

[Shizuko *saunters off to get tea*. Hiro *turns to* Yasako.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

Who's watching Kuniko?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Miss Lauderdale.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Miss Lauderdale? Who is Miss Lauderdale?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Our neighbor. Kuniko's friend.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Oh, yes, yes. When did you learn how to take the bus?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Tonight. Miss Lauderdale explained it.

[*a beat*]

I came to help you.

HIRO YAMASHITA

No, Yasako. Everything's under control here.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Really? Then maybe we can go out. For a walk or —

[Shizuko *saunters back in with tea, places it before* Yasako.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yasako, I brought you fresh tuna at home. Go home, eat, enjoy.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Never enough for me to take home, but enough for sister here, huh?

HIRO YAMASHITA

Go back to work, Miss Mizoguchi.

[*But* Shizuko *lingers*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Papa, take a break. Come walk on the beach with me.

HIRO YAMASHITA

You always want to walk on the beach. I don't like sand in my shoes or the smell of dead fish.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Papa, just tonight. There is a full moon and the beach is so beautiful tonight.

HIRO YAMASHITA

You drink your tea and go home, all right?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Oh go walk on the goddamned beach with her.

HIRO YAMASHITA

You have customers, Miss Mizoguchi, remember? Get back to them before they leave you.

[*to* Yasako]

Maybe we'll walk on the beach tomorrow, okay?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Okay, Papa.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

No it isn't okay. Japanese women gotta learn that. When it isn't okay, don't say it is.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You do not talk to my husband like this.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

[*surprised at* Yasako' *s tone*]

I'm not talking to him. I'm talking to you.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Miss Mizoguchi.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

[*to* Yasako]

That was my tea. There's no more left to go around. But I want you to have it.

[*exits*]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Why do you let her talk like that?

HIRO YAMASHITA

Miss Mizoguchi . . . is a very good waitress. All the customers like her, okay? Now you drink your tea. I'll have dinner packed for you to take home. And we will talk of going to the beach tomorrow, okay?

[*He starts to go, but* Yasako *summons the courage:*]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

No, Papa. It is not okay.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yasako . . .

YASAKO YAMASHITA

It is *not* okay.

HIRO YAMASHITA

[*exasperated*]

Do what you want then. I have work to do.

[*He exits*. Yasako *isn't at all sure what to do next. But* Shizuko' *s return helps her decide. She stands quickly to go*.]

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Sit down.

[*But* Yasako *still tries to go*.]

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

I said sit down.

[*She guides* Yasako *back into her seat and sits next to her*.]

You asked for the tea. Drink it.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

My daughter may wake up and ask for me.

[Yasako *tries to leave*. Shizuko *forces her to keep her seat*.]

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Know what I've got waiting for me at home? A VCR, a color TV, a history worth less than toilet paper. But you, nomi-san, you've had the good life, haven't you? Good and clean.

[Yasako *just stares at her*. Shizuko *laughs*.]

My bathroom's all cluttered with lipsticks and lotions and eye shadows. But yours is tidy, isn't it? Although you could use a little lipstick. No offense, but you look like you don't have a mouth. And a woman needs it to speak her mind.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I'd better be going now.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

I've survived America, Mrs˙ Yamashita. I'm a pioneer. I'm not afraid of the dark. Are you? I think you are. I can tell by the tilt of your chin when you look at me.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

What do you want from me?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Let me guess: you were raised in the provinces with servants, old-fashioned mama who still wears kimono, women's college, married down, refused to be naturalized, never leave the house, thirty-three.

[*a beat*]

I was naturalized, married to an American before. Big trouble, but he taught me how to walk six steps in front of him without shuffling. He was looking for Madame Butterfly; he turned out to be Mr˙ Moth and he's still chasing the golden light. Aren't they all. That's why I have a Japanese lover now. And nothing they say about Japanese men is true. You know: inflexible, no poetry, small penis. Not true.

[Yasako *moves to leave again, but* Shizuko *detains her*.]

By the way, thanks for the lamp.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Lamp?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Hiro gave me a lamp you didn't want. He says you sell all the furniture in the house because you don't want your daughter to fall and get hurt. You know, you can't protect her from the whole world. The world just

comes, breathing hard. You gotta breathe back. Like Hiro. He breathes back.

[Shizuko *rises to leave. This time*, Yasako *wants her to stay*. Shizuko *relaxes in her seat*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

What do you mean "he breathes back?"

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

On my . . . neck.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

. . . y-your neck?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

This long, beautiful thing under my chin.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Are you suggesting that —

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Yes, Mrs˙ Yamashita. You win the grand prize.

[*Jarred*, Yasako *drops her tea cup*. Shizuko *picks it up and plays with it in the palm of her hand*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*trembling*]

How long?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

[*lights a cigarette*]

Too long.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

He is my husband.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

That and a bowl of rice might get you through tomorrow.

[*a beat*]

And don't think I'm skating on silk. He's a piece of work for me, too.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

B-but do you . . . love him?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Wow, that's a pretty bold question for a nice Japanese girl to ask. I hold him all night long, Mrs˙ Yamashita. I dream with him, eat cheeseburgers and strawberry ice cream in bed with him, let him wear his shoes in the house.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Why are you doing this? These are all lies.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Are you sure? Can you take that chance?

[Shizuko *hands* Yasako *a letter*. Yasako *doesn't want to take it*.]

I've been saving this for a long time. Take it. I said take it.

[*She forces the letter into* Yasako' *s hand*. Yasako *drops it*.]

Read it.

[*She gives* Yasako *a business card*. Yasako *holds it like it has a disease*.]

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Here's my card: my number and address. When you're ready to talk, come see me.

[Yasako *looks at the card, tears it in half and drops it at her feet, where the letter lies*.]

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Fine. Tear it up. Pretend what is isn't, just like most Japanese do. Go on smiling, and when you get tired of smiling, ask your husband where I live. It's our apartment and he's there at least three times a week.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Apartment?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

In Japan, the tea is always hot. Got home and you won't have to worry about cold tea ever again. Or try coffee some time.

[*places the tea cup in front of* Yasako]

Good night, Mrs˙ Yamashita. Don't drop any more tea cups. Where I come from in Shizuoka, they say it's bad luck.

[Yasako *stares quietly at* Shizuko, *who stares back with discomfort*. Shizuko *picks up the two pieces of the business card and tucks them into a pocket on* Yasako' *s purse*. Yasako *turns and walks away. Lights cross-fade to another spotlight, in which* Yasako *bows deeply to* Evelyn.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Thank you so much.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Please, don't mention it. She's sleeping restlessly. You might want to check on her.

[Yasako *nods as* Evelyn *exits*. Yasako *kneels as if hovering over her child*. Fuyo *appears and anxiously looks from* Yasako *to the unseen* Kuniko.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*reacts to a waking child*]

Go back to sleep, Kuniko. Mommy will sleep right here next to you on the futon.

[Hiro *enters the light*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

What are you doing here?

HIRO YAMASHITA

I live here. Good night, Kuniko. Come, Yasako.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Where are we going?

HIRO YAMASHITA

To bed.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I am in bed.

HIRO YAMASHITA

My customers would laugh me right out of my restaurant if I told them that my wife prefers to sleep with our daughter.

[*Because he is talking too loud and she fears him waking up the child, she shoos him away from* Kuniko *and into the main area of the Yamashita home*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Americans laugh at taking shoes off in the house, too. So what? The three of us should be sleeping together in the same room, just like we did in Japan.

HIRO YAMASHITA

We did that because there was so little room in that house.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

My mother said we do it to protect our souls.

HIRO YAMASHITA

To hell with your mother and our souls.

[Fuyo' *s spirit reacts*.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

Real life, Yasako. Real life. It just isn't right for me to sleep with Kuniko, especially as she gets older.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Why not?

HIRO YAMASHITA

Because Americans would think something else was going on. They don't understand about the Japanese way. They don't understand that our presence protects Kuniko, or even that we leave the room when it is time for us to be together as man and wife.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

We are Japanese. If this country is so free, why do we have to give up being who we are to live here? Some things I can change, like learning to shake hands instead of bowing, or going to the bathroom differently than I did in Japan. But you are asking me to change the unchangeable.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yasako, here we can wake up late, sing in the street without being thought a lunatic, challenge the system, speak our minds.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

No. You have that freedom.

HIRO YAMASHITA

You have it, too. If you want it. Just like all the other Japanese.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Like the ones who work in your restaurant?

HIRO YAMASHITA

Come to bed.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

For a long time now, I come to bed and you act like you don't want to touch me, but you want me to be there.

For what? To keep you warm? Go to bed by yourself.

[*Angered, he leaves abruptly*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Hiro? Where are you going?

HIRO YAMASHITA

Back to the restaurant.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You just came from the restaurant.

HIRO YAMASHITA

If I can't sleep, I'll work.

[*an order*]

Now go to bed.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*calmly, a test*]

Say hello to Miss Mizoguchi for me.

HIRO YAMASHITA

[*agitated*]

What? What are you saying?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

What are *you* saying?

HIRO YAMASHITA

What the hell are you talking about?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I simply ask you to say hello to a waitress and it makes you very . . . agitated.

HIRO YAMASHITA

You're being ridiculous.

[*Frustrated and angry*, Hiro *storms out. The distraught* Yasako *comes face to face with* Fuyo, *whose hands caress her from an inch away, never touching. But* Yasako *refuses the touch and exits*. Fuyo *moves urgently through the house as if exorcising evil, the tension she feels demonstrated in the taut pulling and wringing of*

her kimono sleeves and the wiping away of her own tears, her hands an inch away from her face. She exits as Yasako *re-enters and lights widen. A letter flutters from above*. Yasako *catches it, opens it, and reads it. She sits down, Japanese style. From upstage center*, Shizuko *steps up behind her. Both women look out to audience during the entire scene. The letter is held up in* Yasako' *s hands*.]

YASAKO AND SHIZUKO

"Dear Mrs˙ Yamashita, . . ."

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

I left Japan behind, and you carry it with you like a dead weight.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

"I feel sorry for you,"

YASAKO AND SHIZUKO

But I have to think of myself, too.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

I have been faithful to your husband for three years, waiting for him to fulfill his promises.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

"My patience is wearing thin. You can imaging what this is like, since you have only known about me for a few weeks and already you have lost patience."

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Mrs˙ Yamashita, give him a divorce and return to Japan.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

"Let him go before he lets you go. It's easier that way."

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

What other choice is there because of this shame Hiro has brought into your life. Into our lives.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

"Please forgive me. I didn't go looking for all this trouble."

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Trouble came to me and I was too lonely to say no. And now I love him.

YASAKO AND SHIZUKO

I have no choice but to prepare a future with him.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

You will do okay back in Matsuyama.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

"Return to the place where you belong."

YASAKO AND SHIZUKO

Don't do anything foolish.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

America's no place for those who can't take what they want without saying I'm sorry.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

"Sincerely yours,"

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Shizuko Mizoguchi.

[*Blackout as sounds of children playing in a park fade in. Spotlight on* Yasako. *She writes in the journal*. Kuniko' *s laughter is heard and* Yasako *waves at the unseen child*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Kuniko, be careful! Don't fall in the mud! Don't go so fast on the monkey bars! Oh, Kuniko, silly little monkey.

[*reacts as if* Kuniko *is rushing toward her*]

Oh, Kuniko, no, no! Don't jump on Mommy! You'll get mud all over. . . .

[*stops as she smiles in defeat and wipes imaginary mud from her clothing*]

Kuniko-chan. So cute.

[*The spotlight widens to accommodate* Shizuko *as she enters*. Yasako *stands protectively around the unseen child and tries to keep her as far away as possible from* Shizuko.]

[*to "child"*]

Kuniko-chan, go play please. Go play on the swings. Mommy will watch you. Good girl.

[*turns to stare at* Shizuko]

What do you want?

[Shizuko *picks up* Yasako' *s journal and leafs through it*.]

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Do you write down everything you do?

[Yasako *just stares at her*.]

Good idea. Too bad we can't control our men in the same way. Of course, in this situation, it's our man. Just one. Maybe we should just cut him in half. Which half do you want?

[Yasako *grabs her book out of* Shizuko' *s hands*.]

Did you read my letter?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Stop following me, Miss Mizoguchi.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Good, you did read it. When are you leaving?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Maybe you better go back to work and mind your own business.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Time's running out for me, Mrs˙ Yamashita. Read the letter again.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I have been married to Hiro for eight years.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

. . . and I have been fucking him for three years.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You are vulgar.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

It's a vulgar world, Mrs˙ Yamashita.

[*a beat*]

When something is over, it's over. He will come to live with me. Do you want that kind of shame for you and your daughter?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Who are you to talk about shame?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Listen, sister, you're no better than me. We're both trying to cut it in this frontier. The difference is I can and you never will.

[*a beat*]

He wants to get it over by New Year's.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You are lying.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Wait and see. Suddenly, he's going to offer you a trip to Japan. As a Christmas present.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Miss Mizoguchi, how is it that you feel free here and I am the cat trapped in a pillowcase?

[*The question surprises* Shizuko. *There is a look of compassion on her face for* Yasako.]

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Because you don't ask to be more than a cat.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

What do you ask to be?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Godzilla.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

My father's mistress was discreet.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

I'm not interested in being that stupid.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Is it so stupid?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Hiro loves me, Mrs˙ Yamashita. In a different kind of way than he loves you. And my kind of love is the kind he needs right now.

[Yasako *tries to focus on her child*.]

You think I'm evil, don't you? A jealous devil breaking up your family. Well, I'm not. If you want to blame someone, you have to blame Hiro, too.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

My husband is not the type to have an affair.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Right. He's the type to have a relationship. Which is exactly what he's having — with me. And now we all have to deal with it.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Why do we have to deal with it? Why can't you just go away?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

For the same reasons you can't.

[Yasako *reacts as if* Kuniko *has run up to her. The child's presence silences the women and forces them to be calm*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Hi Kuniko-chan. Are you finished? Say good-bye to the . . . nice lady. Papa's . . . friend.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Hi, little girl. I'm Shizuko.

[Yasako *quickly cuts between* Shizuko *and the imaginary* Kuniko *to protect her child from this "evil."*]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*a warning to back off*]

Good evening, Miss Mizoguchi.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Good evening.

[Shizuko *exits. The sound of* Kuniko *giggling is heard*. Yasako *turns suddenly in fear*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Kuniko, no! Don't climb up there. It's too high. No, Kuniko! Come down!

[*witnesses* Kuniko' *s fall, which is heard as a thump followed with cries*]

Kuniko!

[*runs forward and bends over* Kuniko]

Are you all right? Oh, Kuniko, poor thing. Your arm. I think it is broken. Come, Kuniko-chan. Mommy will take you to the hospital.

[Yasako *picks up the unseen* Kuniko. *She stares straight ahead*.]

Uh, hello. I am Yasako Yamashita. My daughter has a broken arm, I think.

[*a beat*]

Fill out papers? Get in line again? But how can you make her wait out here with all these strangers when she is in pain?

[*takes the papers*]

Don't you understand? We have to go back to Japan. You have to fix her, make her just like she was, make everything just like it was.

[Yasako *gathers her child and runs out*.]

[*Lights cross-fade to another spotlight, which* Yasako *enters*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Hello. I would like to buy a book for my daughter. She is a second grader, but she reads eighth-grade level.

[*surprised that she is not understood*]

I am speaking English!

[*enunciates slowly, deeply frustrated*]

I would like to buy a book for my daughter. Eighth-grade level.

[*taken aback*]

Excuse me, sir, but I was here first. Sir! Do you hear me? I was here first!

[*Lights cross-fade to another spotlight, which* Yasako *enters. She's a powder keg*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

This is Mrs˙ Yamashita.

[*spells out*]

Y-a-m-a-s-h-i-t-a.

[*spells out again, more slowly*]

Y-a-m-a-s-h-i-t-a. Yasako. Yasako. No. Yamashita is my last name. Yamashita.

[*Lights cross-fade to another spotlight, which* Yasako *enters*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

He would not take his hands off Kuniko's face? And you did not scold this . . . this bully? No wonder Kuniko pushed him! Miss Nancy, usually I nod and smile at everything you people say and do. I keep my anger inside and quietly walk away. But don't you understand? Kuniko does not want the hands of a child on her face. That boy's hands could have been in dirt, his nose, his pants.

[*to audience*]

That is what I want to say to this stupid teacher who probably takes a bath only twice a week.

[*pain, sadness, shame*]

But I just nod my head, smile, and quietly walk away. And Kuniko looks at me like I am not a hero. She says to me, "Mommy, in Japan could you be Super-Mom?"

[*Lights cross-fade*.]

Act 1, Scene 3

SCENE THREE

[*Twilight. A nervous* Yasako *paces. A letter and her journal are on the floor. A laundry basket full of folded clothes, a small suitcase, a small basin of water are present. She looks in her journal, writes, puts it down, paces again*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*creating a poem*]

"The sea is . . . the sea is a bridge of light, leading back into the warmth of honor, away from its scant reflections in this life, the mere images of honor, those masks of paint and clay."

[*Restless, shethrows down the journal. She takes several crumpled checks out of her pocket, kneels, and carefully smooths them. She places them by the suitcase*.]

[*Enter* Hiro.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

Here you are again. Pacing at 3 A˙M˙ Are you sure you're okay?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You should know that Kuniko broke her arm. She fell off the monkey bar.

HIRO YAMASHITA

What happened?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I was not watching her closely enough.

HIRO YAMASHITA

A mother can't afford to be distracted, Yasako.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I am sorry. I won't ever let her get hurt again.

[*a beat*]

Sit. Let me wash your feet.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Go to sleep, Yasako. What's bothering you every single night, walking the floors like a ghost?

[*a beat*]

It's Japan, right? We'll go back to visit, okay?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

We will?

HIRO YAMASHITA

[*casually*]

Yeah. Maybe for Christmas.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*devastated*]

Christmas? Not Christmas.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yes. A nice present for you. Five months away. Plenty of time to plan.

[*She nervously pulls at her hair. A tuft comes out*.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

What — what's the matter with your hair?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

. . . everything is falling apart. So much noise.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yasako. Please. Sit down. Let me see your hair. Let me see.

[*She pulls at her hair again and more comes out*.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

[*restraining her*]

Stop that!

[*She yanks away with a force that surprises him. She grabs the suitcase*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*thrusting suitcase at him*]

Here.

HIRO YAMASHITA

What is this?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Your necessary things.

[*a quick beat*]

Go. Please.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Come here. Let me hold you.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I SAID TO GO.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yasako, I am not having an affair, okay? I am just trying to manage some problems at the restaurant. Can't you understand?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

What I understand is that we have no honor.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Who gives a damn about honor?

[*She reaches for the checks*.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

What are you doing?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

The laundry.

[*She shakes them at him, tosses them at his feet*.]

Why all the checks to Miss Mizoguchi? What are you buying from her?

HIRO YAMASHITA

Nothing.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I packed three trousers, four shirts, and seven underwear. I can mail you the rest.

[Hiro *kicks the suitcase*.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

Why don't *you go*? You're the one who can't cut it here.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You have made sure of that.

HIRO YAMASHITA

You think it'll be any easier if you run home to Matsuyama? No. Not for you. Not as a divorced woman who lived in America too long. Besides, Kuniko doesn't want to live in Japan.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*shocked, angry*]

You're trying to take my daughter away from me.

HIRO YAMASHITA

It wouldn't have been any different in Japan, Yasako. You know that. Even your brother has a mistress. My father had one, too.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Why can't you be different?

HIRO YAMASHITA

Why can't *you* be different?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Different from what? A Japanese woman? An American woman? Different from what?

HIRO YAMASHITA

You are my wife, Yasako.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

That and a bowl of rice might get me through tomorrow.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Don't talk like that.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Or maybe just through the next five minutes.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Stop, Yasako.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Fire her.

HIRO YAMASHITA

What?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

If I am your wife, fire her.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Surely you aren't suggesting you would divorce me.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Half of American marriages end up that way.

HIRO YAMASHITA

If we were in Japan, you would accept this, live with it honorably.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Don't you remember? Honor is what we flush down the toilet. There is no honor in this house, unless you've been to the bathroom lately.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Stop talking like that. American women would never act like this. They'd take it in stride.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

And then kill you in your sleep.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yasako!

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Poison your drink or —

HIRO YAMASHITA

Stop it!

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Or wait until you were in the deepest sleep and then cut off your penis.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yasako, please! Here. Take some money. Go out tomorrow. To the beach, shopping, buy Kuniko some more books. Something.

[*He tries to hand her bills. She takes them, looks at them for a moment, and then lets them flutter to the floor as she stares at him*.]

Okay then, get your American divorce. Will that make you happy? Go to Las Vegas and get a 24-hour one.

[*He kicks the money on the floor toward her. They stare at each other, at a standoff*.]

Business is good now, too good. It has made me busy . . . and crazy. Try to get it through your head that it doesn't mean anything and —

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Are you going to fire her or not?

[*stares at him intensely*]

HIRO YAMASHITA

[*stares back for a few moments and then looks away; sighs with exasperation*]

That will solve all your problems?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Yes.

HIRO YAMASHITA

[*further exasperation*]

Okay. Okay then.

[Hiro *sits. She gets the basin of water and sits beside him*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

The water may be cold. But I will wash your feet —

HIRO YAMASHITA

Don't.

[*She persists*.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

I SAID TO STOP IT.

[*pushes her away*]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Papa.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Don't be so ridiculous! Can't you see how ridiculous you are? Don't be so nice to me!

[*He storms out. A letter flutters from above. She stares at it, reluctant to read it, and then picks it up as lights tighten to a spotlight. She begins to read*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

"Dear Mrs˙ Yamashita,. . ."

[Shizuko *enters and stands on the periphery of the light*.]

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Dear Mrs˙ Yamashita.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

"Hiro has told me that you are not feeling well."

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

You have a small bald spot on your head where you have picked your hair, your nerves electric, your hands shaking.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

"This makes me sad, especially because he speaks of it when he's sleeping in my bed."

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

I know you have discarded your journal.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

"As if there is nothing left to record."

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

We Japanese are funny, aren't we? Each struggling to be the one who ends up with the most honor, but the fight gets so ugly that it's all blown to smithereens and nobody ends up with anything.

[*a beat*]

Yasako?

[Yasako *looks up and locks eyes with* Shizuko *for a moment*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Yes?

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

[*embarrassed, frightened]*

. . . I am . . . pregnant with your husband's child.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Oh no. No.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

It will be a boy. Born in January. It's true. I wish it wasn't.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

No.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

I haven't had the courage to tell Hiro.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

"Thank you for listening. Sincerely yours,. . ."

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Shizuko Mizoguchi.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

"P˙S˙"

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Please take care of yourself.

[Yasako *tears up the letter. Lights dim*.]

Act 1, Scene 4

SCENE FOUR

[*A spotlight*. Evelyn *enters*. Yasako, *disheveled and distraught, comes up behind her, startling her*.]

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Oh, it's you, Mrs˙ Yamashita. Good morning. How are you today?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*eerily calm*]

Everything is fine.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Would you like to come in and have a cup of tea?

[Yasako *shakes her head and moves away, as if she's going to leave. Sensing this*, Evelyn *takes her by the arm*.]

Are you sure everything's fine?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*suddenly desperate, urgent*]

Miss Lauderdale, I want to go back to Japan.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

For good?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Today. I need to go today.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Today?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Yes.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Today. Uh, okay.

[*trying to buy time*]

Uh, does your husband know about this?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I need to borrow money, Miss Lauderdale. For two tickets.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

This is very sudden, Mrs˙ Yamashita. I'm concerned that you —

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Please. I have family there. I can work and send your money back in a few months.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

I'm not worried about the money. You just don't seem like yourself. Maybe you and your husband need to talk about this some more. Maybe I can help in some small —

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Never mind.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

No, I mean it. Come inside. Let me make you a cup of tea. We'll talk about this. Come on.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

How can I expect you to understand.

[*Hurt*, Evelyn *exits as* Fuyo' *s spirit enters*. Yasako *turns toward her home only to face* Fuyo' *s gaze. That gaze holds an answer for* Yasako — *the one person who can understand. Lights cross-fade*.]

Act 1, Scene 5

SCENE FIVE

[*The Yamashita home*. Fuyo *sits at* Yasako' *s side. The sounds of the ocean are heard*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*sad, plaintive*]

"Haru ga kita, haru ga kita. Doko ni kita . . ."

[*suddenly she looks up and forces a smile, wiping away her tears*]

Kuniko-chan! Good morning, little one.

[Fuyo' *s eyes follow the "child" as she emerges*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Yes, yes, we will go to the beach. Be a good girl and brush your hair.

[*to* Fuyo]

Is it time to go?

[Fuyo *nods*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

What if Kuniko stayed here?

[Fuyo *stares at her*. Yasako *knows the answer. An impatient* Hiro *enters, put on a tie*. Fuyo, *apprehensive*

toward him, moves to side stage.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

Where are you going?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

To walk along the shore, play in the sand.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Don't go swimming. Bacteria. Just walk.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

She wants to collect sea shells.

[*a beat*]

Do you . . . do you want to walk with me? With us?

HIRO YAMASHITA

[*evasive*]

Not today.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I see.

[*He prepares to leave and* Yasako *suddenly tries to stop him*.]

Hiro!

HIRO YAMASHITA

What?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Stay today. Come to the beach with us.

HIRO YAMASHITA

I have work to do, Yasako. Just work. Another day.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Just today. Stay home.

HIRO YAMASHITA

I can't. Besides, you know I hate the beach. You go, enjoy yourself. Papa loves you Kuniko-chan. Bye-bye.

[Hiro *exits*. Fuyo *nods her head three times and claps her hands silently once. Ocean sounds intensify as* Fuyo *beckons to* Yasako *to follow, her arms moving like waves as lights darken*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

We are going on a long journey, ne, Kuniko-chan. To . . . home. Hold my hand.

[*Ocean sounds crescendo. Downstage, enter two kuro-ko, with long streamers of ocean-colored silk that they propel from fans repeatedly. Lights reflect the ocean on the scrim*. Yasako *faces the audience, the "sea."* Fuyo *encircles* Yasako *and becomes part of the kuro-kos's wave-like movement*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Can you see the mermaids waiting? Bow to the mystical sea, Kuniko. Our souls float, our bodies dance.

[Yasako *and voice-over of* Kuniko *and* Fuyo *chant the earlier poem in unison as* Yasako *gently pushes forward the "child"*:]

FUYO, YASAKO, AND VOICE

Se o hayami iwa ni sekaruru takigawa no warete mo sue ni awanto zo omou . . . kono yo de . . . ai masho.

[*Crashing waves intensify; lights whirl, drums beat*. Yasako *sinks beneath the silky, turbulent waters, disappearing in the waves, as lights fade to black*.]

Act 2

ACT II SCENE ONE

[*Spotlight center stage on* Yasako *in plain prison garb, her eyes closed*. Fuyo *moves around her in a frenzy as a taiko drum beats*. Kuniko' *s laughter surrounds her, mixed with ocean sounds*. Fuyo *kisses her an inch away from her forehead and then runs out*. Yasako *sits up and looks around in fear and confusion. And then footsteps are heard, and the sound of a cell door clanging shut. The lights suddenly go to full and glaringly bright, revealing* Angela Rossetti *standing next to* Yasako.]

ANGELA ROSSETTI

[*extends a hand*]

Hello. I'm Angela Rossetti, your attorney. I need to ask you a few questions?

[*silence from* Yasako]

Are you okay? Can I get you anything?

[*more silence; giving up on the pleasantries*, Angela *gets to work*]

Do you remember where you went with your daughter yesterday, Mrs˙ Yamashita?

[*pronounces it "yama-SHEET-tah"*]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*distrust, fear*]

. . . I-I-I woke up and I was in the hospital and . . . and there was a g-g-guard and I asked him where Kuniko was and . . .

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Tell me what happened at the beach.

[Yasako *remembers and starts to cry*. Angela *approaches, pats her gently on the shoulder*.]

ANGELA ROSSETTI

You do know that she is . . .

[*simultaneously*]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Gone.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Dead.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

And you can go now, too. Just tell me when I can go back to the beach.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

I'm afraid you won't be going anywhere for a while, Mrs˙ Yamashita.

[*a beat*]

First-degree murder. That's what the State of California plans to charge you with.

[Yasako *registers shock*.]

ANGELA ROSSETTI

The court has appointed me to represent you, and I plan to do so to the best of my ability.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Murder?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

I plan to fight for a lesser conviction of voluntary manslaughter.

[*a beat*]

Problem is, Americans don't take too kindly to people killing children, and it'll be Americans staring out at you from the jury. And probably not the kind who eat steamed white rice with their meals. This is a conservative town, full of retired Navy guys whose buddies were killed in World War II.

[*a beat*]

So we've got a fight on our hands.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You had no right to stop us!

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Calm down. I didn't. It was two hotel guests. They thought you were drowning. And now your child is dead and you're alive. Though, to be honest, there are a few people in city hall who wish you weren't.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Is that what you wish?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

My wishes are irrelevant.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I did not kill my child.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Let's put it this way, when I take my five-year-old daughter to the beach, we walk along the sand, not into the Pacific Ocean.

[Yasako *is taken aback by this outburst*. Angela *wishes she hadn't let it show. She tries to compose herself; she does a good job of it. She comforts* Yasako.]

But, of course, this isn't about me. It's about you. And I'm sorry that I acted like a mother first. Sometimes it just swallows up everything else you are.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Yes, I know. But it is supposed to. That's why you have to let me catch up with Kuniko.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

She's gone, Mrs˙ Yamashita. Her body is in the morgue and you don't want to go there. We're trying to locate your husband.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

No. He must not come here.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

[*concerned*]

What happened, Mrs˙ Yamashita?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Promise me you won't let him bother me.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

I'll try.

[*a quick beat*]

Now I know this is difficult, but I need you to explain to me what happened as best as you can.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

We were . . . traveling.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Traveling?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

In a vessel that you cannot begin to understand.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

A vessel. Uh huh.

[*Exasperated*, Angela *addresses an offstage persona*.]

Could somebody bring us some coffee, please?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*urgently*]

I need tea. Green tea.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

[*to offstage persona, caring*]

The lady wants green tea. Can we accommodate her?

[*Lights cross-fade to two spotlights in which* Evelyn *and* Hiro *stand, in mid-conversation on imaginary phones*. Hiro *waits for her to speak as* Shizuko *embraces him from behind*. Evelyn *struggles with tears*.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

How did you get this number?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Th-th-they tried to call you.

HIRO YAMASHITA

[*impatient*]

Are you all right?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

They couldn't find you. She had them call me.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yasako? What's happened? Where are they?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

[*fresh tears*]

O-oyako shinju.

HIRO YAMASHITA

They're dead? They're both dead?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

K-Kuniko. She . . . drowned . . .

[Shizuko *studies his distraught state with concern. She pulls away*.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

Kuniko is drowned? My daughter is drowned?

[Shizuko *gasps and turns away*.]

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

They saved Yasako.

HIRO YAMASHITA

What hospital is she in?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

[*pressing him*]

She came to me, Mr˙ Yamashita, very upset. She said she had to go back to Japan.

HIRO YAMASHITA

What hospital is she in?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

She's not in a hospital. She's in jail.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Jail? Why jail? What did she do wrong?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

This is America, Mr˙ Yamashita. They call it murder.

HIRO YAMASHITA

No! I must go to her. I must see her.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Mr˙ Yamashita, what made her think there was no other choice?

[*then . . .*]

Why was she so distraught? Was something happening between the two of you?

HIRO YAMASHITA

That is none of your business.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

You're wrong, Mr˙ Yamashita. And, after today, it's going to be everybody's business.

[*Lights cross-fade to prison*. Yasako *sits*. Evelyn *arrives with a small box*. Yasako *is so ashamed that she will not raise her head. She stares down at her hands*.]

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

When I read the article in the paper and all the horrible things they said about you, I said to myself, "That doesn't sound like my neighbor." So I came to bring you this.

[*hands* Yasako *the box*]

They're torn because they had to inspect them.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Thank you. Sorry for the trouble.

[*bows*]

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

You sound just like my mother.

[*a beat*]

I made them myself.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You made this o-manju? I have never known Americans to even eat these.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

My father was American, but my mother was from Japan.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You never told me.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

I never told you she was Japanese because, well, it seemed unnecessary to point it out. Unless you had asked.

[Yasako *leans forward, as does* Evelyn *in response*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Do you think what I did was wrong?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

[*troubled*]

My mother probably wouldn't have thought so.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

But what about you?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

I don't know. I understand, but then I don't understand. Because I'm not in your situation. Also, I don't look Japanese, so it's easier for me. Sometimes.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Miss Lauderdale, I want you to bring me some . . . special tea.

[*looks over her shoulder*]

The kind that will allow me to . . . travel.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Mrs˙ Yamashita, I can't do that.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

In the cabinet to the left of the stove, there is a tea cup painted gold and rust. In that tea cup, I wish to drink my tea.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

[*overlapping, evading*]

I brought you a book. Here. You can rest and read.

[*shaken, a pause*]

I-it's too late, Mrs˙ Yamashita.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

My family travels the universe now. Before you said you would do anything to help me. Please.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Last year, my mother died. I don't want you to die, too. You're meant to live.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

But how? How am I supposed to do that?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Let me help you. Let me be your friend.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You should go now.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

I'm sorry.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Just go. Please do not come again.

[Evelyn *fades into the darkness upstage. As lights cross-fade, a* Sound Bite *cuts in:*]

SOUND BITE

Mrs˙ Rossetti? We understand that you're a mother. How can you begin to justify your client's actions? How can you even stand to represent the case of an alleged child murderer?

[*Lights cross-fade to downstage as* Angela *and* Yasako *enter the cell*. Yasako *manipulates a black tea bag with her hands*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Those white guards out there. They called me "baby killer."

ANGELA ROSSETTI

[*a beat*]

Fuck 'em.

[*This responses brings a faint smile to* Yasako' *s lips*.]

Okay, Mrs˙ Yamashita. I'm a white woman on the jury from, say, Topeka, Kansas. I'm Catholic, with balls of iron, and I've got one very precious child. Convince me that what happened was not, according to your system of beliefs, something bad. What'd you call it again?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Oyako-shinju.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Parent-child suicide, right?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Until a certain age, the child is inseparable from the mother. The egg and what it has created are one. If I had taken my life and left my child behind to be raised by substitute mothers, I would have dishonored my family.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

I don't buy that. Not in any culture. Let me tell you, Mrs˙ Yamashita, if anybody tried to harm my child, I'd kill them without a second thought. And probably with my bare hands.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

So would I. That is why I took her with me. Bun-shin. "Bun" means divide and "shin" means part of the body. I consider my child bun-shin; my body divides to create the child and we are one. Here you believe that the child is an individual, separate from you.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

And Kuniko Yamashita was not an individual in your eyes?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Bun-shin is like a tree. The child is the branch that needs to stay connected to grow. So, if you — the tree — dies, the branch dies.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

But if just the branch dies, can't the tree continue to live, grow new branches and leaves?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*without self-pity*]

Who cares about the tree? No one needs the tree.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

There was a woman in Kansas City — white; she killed her son and was about to join him when her husband caught her. She went to jail for life. And the American public wouldn't've even flinched if she'd been burned at the stake.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

An American woman? You would have killed her for . . . for doing this?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

I wouldn't do it. But the People might.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

What people?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

The People of the United States.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You mean a whole gang? A whole gang of Americans?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

It's a phrase, Yasako. The People, capital "P." The government. The good of our society.

[*a beat*]

I found three cases of Japanese women who ended up with lesser charges of manslaughter. So in arguing for a reduced sentence, I'll use cultural defense to make our case.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Cultural defense?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Laotian man beats up his wife, and when he gets arrested, he looks at the police in surprise — maybe even shock — and says, "What do you mean I'm in trouble because I beat up my wife? I own her. I can do whatever I want with her." To him, see, the wife is as good as a dog. But this is America. He goes to jail and she gets a divorce.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

American men do not beat up their wives?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

[*looks at her as if to say touché and sighs*]

The Laotian man has an easier time of it in the courts because, in Laos, his behavior is within the law. The courts ask him to realize that he must adapt to the American way, but they give him a break.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

But then he is no longer Laotian if he exchanges his culture for yours.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

. . . I'm still Italian.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

. . . and I am still the tree.

[*The women stare at each other over a confounding impasse*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

What is your daughter's name?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

. . . Samantha.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

That is a nice name.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Thank you.

[*a beat*]

I'll bring you some good tea next time.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*hands her the tea bag with apologetic bow*]

Sorry. I do not like American black tea. It is so bitter. Like everything else here, you have to sweeten it or it is impossible to swallow.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

So sweeten it. Is that so difficult?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*nods*]

Kuniko means child of the country. I named her that because I wanted her to feel like a child of Japan even though she had to grow up here.

[*begins to cry*]

ANGELA ROSSETTI

[*with sadness*]

She didn't grow up, Mrs˙ Yamashita. She didn't grow up.

[Yasako' *s tears grow fervent*. Angela' *s impulse is to comfort her, but she cannot bring herself to do so. Exit* Angela. *Lights cross-fade to downstage*. Hiro *stands to give a speech*. Evelyn *sits nearby, holding a clipboard full of petitions*.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

Thank you all for coming to this important community meeting this evening.

[Shizuko *appears in an upstage spotlight. She looks exhausted. Her clothes look slept-in*. Hiro *and* Evelyn *continue to function unaware of her presence. She also is unaware of theirs*.]

HIRO YAMASHITA

There are many reasons why we are gathered here tonight.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

The room is cold. He's still here, but not really. Not now.

HIRO YAMASHITA

I-I wasn't the best husband or father that my family deserved.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

. . . Hiro collapses to his knees screaming, "KUNIKO, KUNIKO," and tells me that he killed his child . . .

HIRO YAMASHITA

Japanese culture is different from American culture. But what I want to make clear is that my wife, Yasako Yamashita, is not a murderer.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Winter in his eyes.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Especially considering the incredible bond my wife had with our daughter, Kuniko.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Winter . . .

HIRO YAMASHITA

All of your ancestors originally came from other lands, and as they struggled to carve a place for themselves in America, they, too, had trouble coming to terms with new cultural views of right and wrong. In this way, we are all the same.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

I gather all my things and leave without a note.

HIRO YAMASHITA

This has been a terrible accident. I hope you will forgive us.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

I cannot compete with ghosts.

[*looks out toward audience*]

HIRO YAMASHITA

Please sign this petition asking for leniency for Yasako. Please, for the sake of my child.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Yasako?

HIRO YAMASHITA

This is our neighbor, Miss Launderdale. She is Japanese and American. She can understand both sides of this. I ask your help, because the media, the public is against us. Ask your friends to sign them as well.

SHIZUKO MIZOGUCHI

Yasako-san? I leave all my secrets to you. Keep them for me, okay? Keep them.

[*bows all the way to floor*]

HIRO YAMASHITA

Thank you.

[Evelyn *mimics handing out petitions as she exits. Lights fade and* Shizuko *rises. For a brief moment, her eyes and* Hiro' *s meet. Lights cross-fade to prison where* Angela *and* Yasako *sit on the cot*.]

ANGELA ROSSETTI

She said she was Godzilla? Miss Mizoguchi's quite a piece of work. One doesn't often hear of such aggressiveness in Japanese women.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Let me guess. You merely saw "Shogun" on American TV and now you are expert, ne? I saw "Shogun." It was like *Gone with the Wind*, but Japanese style. Are you Scarlett O'Hara?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

I'm sorry. Please, Yasako. I'm here to help you.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Do you believe you possess a soul?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

What? Well, yes, I think so.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Then you believe you have lived before and will live again.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

I'm not so sure. I'm a recovering Catholic, reinventing my faith. But I know I have a soul.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Where have you lived before?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Cincinnati.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*disappointed in her*]

I see.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Before that, I lived in Des Moines.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Well, I lived in ninth-century Kyoto.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

I see.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Do you?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Yes. I understand. Traveling . . . In a vessel. Is that a Japanese belief?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I don't know. It is my belief.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

I guess there are many metaphysical possibilities.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Now I want to . . . live somewhere else.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

A life is a precious thing, Yasako. Your life was precious even to a stranger. I want to believe that if this had happened in Japan, a Japanese also would have dragged you from the sea.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I failed as a wife. And now I have failed as a mother, too.

[*a beat*]

And all you know of life is that yesterday you lived in Cincinnati and today you live in San Diego.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Yasako, you have to stop wanting to die and start wanting to live.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

. . . what happens in San Diego when you are convicted of murder? Is it absolutely certain I would be put to death?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

You think it's that easy to get yourself killed? Listen to me very carefully: It means you're admitting guilt. That's like getting up in front of all your Japanese relatives and saying, "I murdered Kuniko."

YASAKO YAMASHITA

No! I did not and I will not say that. But I want the death sentence. It's the only way I can catch up with Kuniko.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

A guilty sentence doesn't mean you waltz to the gas chamber and join your daughter. It means you *might* get to go. But it also means that, in the eyes of the world — including a lot of Japanese — you are disgraced, you are the cold-blooded killer of the child you brought into this world.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*momentarily stunned, then draws into herself, stony*]

. . . someone once told me that, in America, only soldiers and super-heroes get to die with honor.

[Yasako *and* Angela *stare at one another as lights cross-fade to another spotlight*. Evelyn *sits. She and* Angela *are in mid-interview*.]

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

A few days later, he finally broke down and told me that he'd been having an affair with a Miss Mizoguchi. He said he loved her, but he also loved his wife.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

How special.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

The woman left abruptly. He hasn't seen her. He wants to see Yasako. Has she changed her mind?

[Angela *shakes her head*.]

Does she know about his efforts to help her?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

She doesn't want to be helped, saved, or pitied. She just wants to die.

[*With a touch of guilt*, Evelyn *looks away*.]

Tell me, Ms. Lauderdale. Mr˙ Yamashita's Japanese; he's adapted. Why can't Yasako?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

She was raised by a woman who grew up before the war. That means old customs, old-fashioned ways.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

But I don't get it. Does that mean a lot of Japanese resort to suicide when something goes wrong?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

It may surprise you to know that Americans have a higher suicide rate than Japanese, especially American young people.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Okay. Fine. Good point.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

So what are you going to do?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

The cultural defense isn't enough. To get the jury to be lenient, I have to plead temporary insanity, Ms. Launderdale.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Insanity? Why?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

To save my client.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

But she's not insane. Why can't we plead not guilty?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Plead that and the jury will grind their heels in her face. In the eyes of that jury, she's psychologically disturbed. They can buy that, maybe even feel sorry for her. I want you to convince her that the insanity plea's the best way to go. I brought it up with her and she asked me to leave.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Is that how it's going to be? If you can't be like everybody else, then let's call you mentally deviant and shove you out of the way? Are you her friend or enemy, Mrs˙ Rossetti?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Neither. I'm her attorney. Look, if it makes you feel any better, I don't think she was thinking about murdering her child when she walked into the ocean. God help me, I think she was thinking about saving her child.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

You mean you really believe she was innocent?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

She's not innocent. But she's not guilty either. Here's a riddle for you: is it more crazy for people to expect everyone to behave just like them or for someone like Yasako to expect to behave in another way, but still live among the people?

[*a beat*]

What am I saving Yasako for? A lifetime of insomnia as she curses herself for not getting it right? Now that's insane. Good day, Ms. Lauderdale. I think I'll go take my daughter out for a root beer float.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

[*as* Angela *crosses*]

I've done some research . . . It's not right for Yasako to be labeled as insane or in any way be painted as a cold-blooded baby-killer.

[*a beat*]

So I think we should let the judge decide and plead no contest.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

You think I haven't thought of that? Don't you know it's the same thing as a guilty plea to the prosecution?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

But it's not the same thing to Yasako. And that's what matters, isn't it?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Thanks for the advice, counselor.

[Angela *exits and then* Evelyn *exits*. A Sound Bite *of court hallway noises, busy reporters, cuts in:*]

SOUND BITE

Mrs˙ Rossetti! Mrs˙ Rossetti! We understand that the defendant has lived in this country for six years. Isn't it true that if we let every new immigrant keep their customs and not assimilate that we're asking for trouble for the future of this country?

[Angela *enters the cell where* Yasako *sits, as lights cross-fade*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Thank you for green tea.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

You're welcome. So you wanted to see me. What's up?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I have come up with my own plan, Mrs˙ Rossetti.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

All right. Let's hear it.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

. . . I will pretend hysteria. You will say I need special tests. Then they will let me leave to go to a hospital. And you can take me back to the ocean.

[Yasako *bows to the floor*. Angela *gently pulls her up. Overwhelmed*, Angela *removes several newspaper articles from a packet and shows them to* Yasako.]

ANGELA ROSSETTI

I think you should see these news stories. You've become a celebrity. Some Americans feel sympathy for you.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*visibly shaken*]

But "Medea?" Why do they call me this "Medea?"

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Do you know Medea? Like you, she was a foreigner. Popular myth says Jason brought her back from the East and she helped him obtain a treasure, the Golden Fleece. When Jason deserted her, she killed their children and fed them to him. There're many different versions of the myth. In another case similar to yours, the attorney argued a Medea-like compulsion exists among Japanese women to react to infidelity by killing their children.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Now we are cannibals, too?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

No. Although Medea is despised in the West, I believe she killed because she knew Jason's new wife would enslave her children.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

The point is to go together. Mrs˙ Rossetti, please. Help me with this plan.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

What about returning to Japan after this, Yasako? Your family would understand.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Maybe, but they will not necessarily forgive. Many may despise me, gossip about me over milk-tea or soda pop — because children are sacred and I have abandoned mine to the afterlife without a mother. You have to understand, Mrs˙ Rossetti. In Japan, we have no crib death because we sleep with our children from the day they are born. We honor, no, we *worship* our children. In America, you have Mother's Day, Father's Day. We have *Children's* Day.

ANGELA ROSSETTI

Yasako, you say the universe is out of balance because your daughter's spirit is fragmented without you. I say this is the only universe we've got.

[*a quick beat*]

I can't take you to the beach, Yasako. I believe too much in freedom. I believe that people have to live and let live, especially in America. I believe you didn't understand the ramifications of what you were doing, at least not in this cultural context. So don't let me do all this hard work for nothing, Yasako. You said the point is to go together. Well, she's already gone, so you can't have that. Let's concentrate on what you can have.

[Angela *gathers the articles and returns them to the packet*. Yasako *espies one that has a photograph of* Kuniko *and her, a reprint of a family snapshot. She grabs it, stares at the photo*.]

It's a good picture of you and your daughter.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Yes, It is.

[Yasako *hands back the photo*. Angela *looks at it, gives it back to her as a gift*. Yasako *bows deeply in appreciation and looks up at* Angela, *who hesitates and then decides to bow*. Angela *exits, acknowledging* Hiro *as she passes him in the "hall."* Hiro *enters the cell*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Get out.

HIRO YAMASHITA

I know you don't want to see me, but —

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Get out or I'll scream.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Stop it. Remember. I'm the only one who knows you really aren't crazy.

[*This remark has an impact on her. Her anger subsides momentarily, then:*]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Of course. After all, you celebrate what I am.

[Hiro *doesn't understand what she means*.]

You celebrate your perfect Japanese wife. You got what you wanted, right? Fine brain, small heart, good sex, clean floors . . . and so traditional that your "perfect" wife is all you have left.

[*a beat*]

Go. Just go.

HIRO YAMASHITA

It's very quiet at home, Yasako.

[*no response*]

I can't go into the restaurant. Every day someone asks, "How are you doing? Are you okay?" I can't smile anymore and say I'm fine — because it's a lie and there have been too many lies already. So I stay home and clean Kuniko's room. I read her books and take a nap in her bed.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*quietly*]

You must fix it if you sleep in it.

HIRO YAMASHITA

[*nods*]

I wish . . . I wish none of this would have happened. I'm sorry that I failed you and Kuniko. I should be in jail now, not you.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You should not sleep in her bed.

HIRO YAMASHITA

I understand, Yasako. You tried.

[*a beat*]

You had responsibility for three lives. Now you only have two.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

One. And you have to let me go.

HIRO YAMASHITA

You look tired, Yasako. But so beautiful. You must sleep and dream again.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Dream of what? What do you want from me? To make you another baby and fix our miserable lives? Forget it. If I could rip my womb out with my bare hands, I would.

HIRO YAMASHITA

I just want you. I . . .

[*a beat*]

I need you.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

What for? What could you possibly want me for but to be what I've always been? I'm not willing to live that way again.

HIRO YAMASHITA

It's just about you, Yasako. To think I almost lost you.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You did lose me, Hiro. I disappeared that day at the beach and I'm not coming back. . . . you're looking at a ghost.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yasako, listen. We can go back to Japan and —

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I don't want to go back to Japan. Not like this.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Okay. Then we can stay. We can stay right here and learn to live a new way.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

How strange that you are now the dreamer and all I can see is the necessary order of things.

HIRO YAMASHITA

Yasako, listen. You can help me at the restaurant. We can be together all the time. And we can talk like we used to when we first met. Who we were is what's dead. Not us. We must go on, learn and repair.

[*a beat*]

Have I ever needed you before?

[*She looks at him for a beat and then slowly shakes her head*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Make certain when you fix the bed that you get the blankets in the right order. She likes the pink-flowered futon on top and the mint one underneath. Make sure you get it right.

HIRO YAMASHITA

[*a beat, then:*]

Okay.

[*Spotlight out. Spotlight downstage center, into which* Yasako *enters and stares at the audience as faint ocean sounds are heard*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*recites*]

She swims so long at sea,
so strong in the current
looking for me.
But the web of the net
detains me as worlds overlap
and I consider the trap.
Whether to die to live
or live in death,
a mother in exile,
a daughter's last breath.
The sea is she
and if I do not go,
then who am I,
what do I know.

[*Ocean sounds and light fades out. Gavel sound thuds exaggeratedly in the darkness*. A Judicial Voice *reverberates from the darkness:*]

JUDICIAL VOICE

You have been arraigned in this court on the charges as specified.

[*a beat*]

Is the defendant ready to enter a plea?

[Yasako *and* Angela *stand in separate spotlights, looking at each other from across the stage*.]

ANGELA ROSSETTI

She is, Your Honor.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I am, Your Honor.

JUDICIAL VOICE

And how do you plead?

ANGELA ROSSETTI

The defendant pleads no contest.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*haltingly*]

. . . no . . . contest.

[*Lights fade out*; Angela *and* Yasako *exit. There is a hubbub of voices, cameras clicking, and footsteps criss-crossing. They crescendo to a pitch and blend with ocean sounds that overwhelm them. Lights fade up on the cell*. Yasako *crosses to light and sits. A nervous* Evelyn *enters*. Yasako *is not happy to see her visitor*.]

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Hello.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Why do you keep coming to the courtroom every day? I asked you to leave me alone.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

You've been handling yourself so well, Yasako. You're going to get through this.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Am I?

[*a beat*]

When I was returning from the courthouse, an American yelled "murderer" and threw a tomato at me. I didn't wipe it off. She was Japanese American.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Well, their mothers aren't from Japan. They don't look at things the Japanese way. They don't even use chopsticks.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Shame, ne. Even in Japan, children do not want to use chopsticks anymore. I hope you use them.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Before I used a fork.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Your mother was smart to teach you the old ways.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

When I have children, I'll teach them, too.

[*a beat*]

Oh. I'm sorry.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

About what?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

I shouldn't talk about . . .

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Children? Oh, no, it's all right.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

We have over five thousand names on the petitions. Mr˙ Yamashita is very excited about it.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Hiro?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

He didn't tell you? He's been the driving force to get signatures on petitions that he's giving to the media and to the court to show that Americans understand your dilemma.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Hiro did that?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

It was his idea. The papers have picked up the story, so even the media seem to be more sympathetic towards your case.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

But I do not want sympathy.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Yasako . . . what honor is there in dying by someone else subjecting you to gas or the chair?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Please get out. You dishonor me with your persistence. You are so American sometimes.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

And sometimes too Japanese for my own good.

[*This remark sparks interest, curiosity in* Yasako. Evelyn *takes from her clothing a small container*.]

. . . I brought you tea. Special tea.

[Evelyn *passes the tea to* Yasako *and* Yasako *stares at the can*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

A-a-are you sure you want to do this?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

No.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

You could get in trouble.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

I've thought about that.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Thank you.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Yasako-san, is suicide so honorable — when it really isn't about shame, but about running away from facing life . . . without Kuniko?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

I'm running *to* her. I think.

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

Are you sure? Are you certain you're not running away?

[*a quick beat*]

She's gone, but we have to go on living . . . somehow. Don't you think that's what Kuniko would want?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Kuniko . . .

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

She would say, "Mommy, don't hurt yourself. Papa needs you." And then she'd sing.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Yes. She would . . .

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

You know. I think Kuniko came to my yard and took my cat away just so she could be the hero and rescue her. I think that's what she did.

YASAKO YAMASHITA

. . . how does one go on living after this?

EVELYN LAUDERDALE

I don't know, but can't we answer that question together?

[Evelyn *and* Yasako *stare at each other with clarity and affection*. Evelyn *exits. Lights close to a tight spotlight*. Yasako *enters the light, kneels, and studies the tea cup as* Fuyo *enters and urges her to drink*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Who cares about the tree when the branch is gone?

ANGELA'S VOICE

[*offstage*]

It must be you who cares. You must start to love yourself, be yourself apart from husband and child. . . .

EVELYN'S VOICE

[*offstage*]

We just do it. We just get up in the morning and start walking into the wind.

HIRO'S VOICE

[*offstage*]

I can't remember which blanket goes on top of Kuniko's bed. Is it the green one or the flowered one? Help me.

KUNIKO'S VOICE

Mommy?

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Kuniko?

KUNIKO'S VOICE

Where's Papa? Make him walk on the beach with you, Mommy. Make him sing like this:

[*sings*]

"Down the river oh down the river oh down the river we go-o-o!"

[*ends singing and giggling*]

Come on, Mommy, you can do it. Bye, Mommy!

[Yasako *stares outward, toward audience, as she struggles with a decision. The wishes of* Kuniko' *s spirit cause her to contemplate life over death*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA
Bare of branches, the tree in winter forever.
But alive, as she would want me to be,
breathing her dreams through me.
Who cares about the tree when the branch dies?
The women say it is I who must rise above
this misery that I have wrought,
I who must face the future
no matter what I've been taught.
And so I go, but it will always be cold.
And ever with me travels her precious soul.

[Yasako *picks up the cup, stares at it, turning it around, and then slowly places it on the floor. The placement is not easy, as if a force pushes it upwards, too. She bows to her mother*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

Mother, do not linger here. Go. Please. Your fate is blessed; mine is cursed. Kuniko needs you.

[*With disappointment*, Fuyo *caresses* Yasako' *s face, her hand coming close but never touching, her face full of longing*. Fuyo *exits in defeat as:*]

Kuniko's Voice

[*sings a bit of "Down the River":*

"The river is up and the channel is deep, the wind is steady and strong. . ."

[*song fades out as* Fuyo *disappears and* Yasako *turns toward* Kuniko' *s fading voice*.]

YASAKO YAMASHITA

[*slow cadence*]

"The river is up and the channel is deep, the wind is steady and strong. Oh won't we have a jolly good time as

we go sailing along. Down the river, oh down the river, oh down the river we go-o-o, Down the river, oh down the river, oh down the Ohio."

[*The exaggeratedly loud slamming of a gavel startles* Yasako *as a* Judicial Voice *reverberates from the darkness. Lights begin a slow tightening, ending up as a small spot, lighting* Yasako' *s face.*]

JUDICIAL VOICE

[*voice-over*]

Yasako Yamashita. The Superior Court of the County of San Diego, State of California, has found you guilty of one count of voluntary manslaughter.

[*a beat*]

You will be sentenced to five years' probation with psychiatric treatment and a year in County Jail.

[*a beat*]

Do you understand the gravity of what has happened to you, and, indeed, to us all, Mrs˙ Yamashita?

[*She does. Her eyes reveal. Extremely slow fade on* Yasako' *s resolute face.*]

END OF PLAY.